

1984 #1



In Memorium Milton Stiefel

Fulfilling his own wish, and his often shouted direction, "draw the curtain fast," Milton Stiefel, founder and Director Emeritus of the Ivoryton Playhouse died at 83 on November 14 last at New York's Wellington Hotel. A native New Yorker, Milton acted with such luminaries of the theater's golden age as E.H. Sothorn, Julia Marlowe and Lionel Barrymore before becoming Assistant Director to David Belasco, Manager for Max Reinhardt and General Manager and Stage Director to Morris Gest. He also directed a number of Broadway plays on his own, including Josephine Hull's "Unexpected Husband."

After the closing of Reinhardt's never surpassed extravaganza "The Miracle" in 1930 Stiefel formed a summer stock company at Ivoryton and by 1941 had produced more than 125 Broadway plays, many for their first run out of Manhattan.

Having been Advisor for Actor's Equity for many years, he was also President of the Association of Summer Stock Theaters and he remained in an advisory capacity to the Ivoryton Playhouse after he sold the Theater in 1975. He was made Director Emeritus after the Ivoryton Playhouse Foundation was formed.

With the drastic change in the public's attitude toward legitimate theater and the popularity of movies after World War II Stiefel saw the need for a fresh and more stimulating "star system" approach instead of the old stock company tradition.

Stiefel convinced Michael Todd of the value of the "package show" in 1947 with the inaugural productions of "Happy Birthday" at Ivoryton. "Happy Birthday," with Todd's wife Joan Blondell, traveled on and was one of the first such productions—thus giving credit to Stiefel as the inventor of the concept which kept actors employed, provided a viable medium for training neophytes and forced a professional performance level with Equity standards and wages upheld.

In addition to setting many talented young people on the road to success, Stiefel was especially proud of presenting black performers Paul Robeson and Ethel Waters at a time long before the civil rights movement affected popular attitudes. Among his proudest technical accomplishments were the introduction of one of the first "off Broadway" revolving stages and the creation of the set for "Dead End" which enabled him to place nearly fifty actors on the small Ivoryton stage without the use of flying ramps.

But his greatest sense of fulfillment is summed-up in a paragraph from an article he wrote for *Theater Arts* nearly forty years ago:

Among the many successful careers started at Ivoryton are those of Buddy Ebsen, Penny Singleton, Louise Camp-



bell, Haila Stoddard, Robert Kent, Leon Janney, Phillip Truex, Shelley and Henry Hunt, Jr. Here, too, Mitzi Green attempted her first dramatic role, as did Paul Haakon and Norma Terris. If [Ivoryton] had no other reason to justify itself than serving as a springboard for the phenomenal Katharine Hepburn that would be sufficient.

Stiefel's developing of the "package show" and its accompanying apprentice concept earned him a citation awarded by Yale University in 1965. This honor gave him particular satisfaction because his acceptance of it underscored his constant prodding of young actors to acquire a formal education. He believed that a sound education was pre-eminent before an aspirant entered any theater company, arguing that the late starter would always come out ahead. He vehemently opposed the route of "just getting a job and working one's way up." He agreed that "damned hard work and a lot of luck" had worked for him, but he always regretted having missed the rewarding experience of formal study. He claimed he could hear the difference at any actor's first reading or the way a new crew member responded to direction.

In accord with Milton's philosophy it seems especially appropriate that many friends have joined with Katharine Hepburn, who has made a leadership pledge, in instituting the first general scholarship undertaken by the Yale School of Drama and to be known as the *Milton Stiefel Scholarship at Yale*. (Details will be sent upon request by writing to The Yale School of Drama, Box 1903A Yale Station, New Haven, CT. 06520)

This theaterman, the last of the great tradition begun by his mentor Belasco, who encouraged (and sometimes browbeat) most of today's professionals, will not only be missed by those who still frequent Ivoryton, but that national "Dramatis Personae" will never again list the full cast.

William C. Bendig

Peg's Letter

We welcome you all to the oldest operating summer playhouse in the country. With you we look forward to another successful season of laughs, tears and much hand clapping.

Mr. William E. Hunt returns for his second season as producer and he assures us that the Ivoryton Tradition of lively summer theater will continue.

Elsewhere in this program you will read a brief history of the Playhouse; here, I want to invite you to participate in its future.

Recognized by the Federal Government as worthy of preservation for its place in American history and culture, our little theatre has been enrolled on The National Register of Historic Places.

The Ivoryton Playhouse Foundation was founded in 1979 with the commitment to preserve this 1908 treasure. We invite you to join the Ivoryton Playhouse Foundation today. . .to preserve the past and to prepare for the future.

Margaret M. Quirin

President

Ivoryton Playhouse Foundation

SPECIAL THANKS



**THE TRUSTEES OF THE IVORYTON PLAYHOUSE
FOUNDATION WISH TO THANK THE FOLLOWING
FOR THEIR SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIONS.**

Belden Libby
Dana Maccio
Doris Fountain
Essex Boat Works
Essex Fire Department
Essex Garden Club
Essex Junction Theater
Essex Machine Works
Fine Bouche
Griswold Inn
Jeffrey Russell
Joel Ide
Jon Ely
Melanie Grimes

Michael C. Wenke
Oliver's Taverne
Pratt-Read Corp.
Restaurant du Village
Richard Riggio
Scholes Agency
Seafloor Bakery
Stuart Ingersoll
The Cuckoo's Nest
Timothy Griswold
Tina Rourke
Tumbledown's
Willy J's

THE NEW IVORYTON PLAYHOUSE COMPANY

presents

SLEUTH

a
Comedy - Mystery by
Anthony Shaffer

with

JOHN MILLIGAN FRANCIS GUINAN

HAROLD K.
NEWMAN

ROGER
PURNELL

PHILIP
FARRAR

*Scenery and
Lighting by*
NADINE CHARLSEN

Costumes by
EIKO YAMAGUCHI

Directed by William E. Hunt

CAST

In Order of Appearance

Andrew Wyke	John Milligan
Milo Tindle	Francis Guinan
Inspector Doppler	Philip Farrar
Detective Sergeant Tarrant	Harold K. Newman
Police Constable Higgs	Roger Purnell

ACT ONE

Andrew Wyke's country home in Wiltshire
A summer evening

ACT TWO

Two days later

Eiko Yamaguchi (Costume Designer) has been costuming in New York for several years with New York Theatreworks, AMAS Repertory, Directors' Collective, Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, Daedalus Productions, H.T. Dance Company and others. Last year she received the Villager Downtown Theatre Award for Outstanding Costume Design for her work on *Tea House*, a Pan Asian Repertory Theatre production with over 50 roles involving over 200 pieces of costuming. Miss Yamaguchi studied at the Cours de Coupe and Ito Dressmaking School in Tokyo before enrolling in Parsons School of Design and Studio and Forum of Stage Design, both in New York. Her designing interests range from costuming to mask and jewelry making and she collects buttons and hatpins.

Special Thanks for their help with furnishings, props and costumes for *Sleuth* to Contemporary Design of New London, La Place Furniture in Deep River, Saybrook Electric Co., Essex Paint & Marine, Pinchpenny Gallery, Riggios Garden Center, Medical Equipment of Centerbrook, Wesleyan Potters, Old Church Potters, Hahn's Motel, Guppies to Puppies, House of Wigs, The Villager, and James J. Devaney.

To Old Friends and New

Welcome to the 1984 season of the Ivoryton Playhouse! We can't tell you how wonderful it feels to be back.

Last season we opened with fear and trepidation for the beautiful old Ivoryton Playhouse, we were told, had seen its best days. We didn't believe it and our faith in the "old lady" was not misplaced.

For although the first weeks may have been rocky, as the season went on we could feel a greater and greater warmth and acceptance coming from our audiences. And with that ever-increasing feeling came larger and larger numbers of friendly faces until we knew for sure that there was plenty of life in the "old girl" yet.

Here she is, fifty-four years old. . .the oldest continuously operating summer theatre in the country. . .**and still going strong.**

And if we please you she'll be kicking up her heels for many many years to come. That is our sole aim. . .to please you. We will put on the best productions we know how.

So again, welcome, this time to our second season. Enjoy!

The New Ivoryton Playhouse Co.
William E. Hunt, Producer

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THE IVORYTON PLAYHOUSE

GROWING ROOTS

The roots of the Ivoryton Playhouse are the oldest in the world. They go back to pre-history in time and some 10,000 miles in distance—to the African elephant! If it were not for the elephant, it is improbable that Katharine Hepburn would have made her Connecticut theatre debut in 1931.

Early in the 1800s, Comstock-Cheney & Company, a firm manufacturing ivory items and with its own fleet of ships to bring the elephant ore from Africa, built a factory in a small Connecticut community, a community which later was to be named Ivoryton after the industry that helped it to continue growing through the years.

To provide a theatre for the members of this community, Comstock-Cheney & Company built a playhouse on a little green knoll under a big tree. That was in 1908, and touring companies of vaudeville and stock performers brought the entertainment for the community. In 1915, silent movies moved in, and the villagers were entertained by the images on the silver screen. The small theatre was a silent picture house until 1928. Then the talkies came, silent movies became a thing of the past, and the door closed upon another entertainment era.

A NEW LIFE

The Playhouse in Ivoryton was not to be abandoned. It was purchased in 1930 by Milton Stiefel who organized and launched the first summer stock theatre in Connecticut and the second in the United States. Mr. Stiefel, a Broadway theatre director, fell in love with the New England countryside and discovered in Ivoryton, an abandoned auditorium. He launched the "Ivoryton Experiment" with an opening production of a light comedy. Mr. Stiefel recalled that it did not do too well since the first week produced a gross of \$80, barely enough to pay the light bill and the insurance.

After struggling for a few weeks, Henry Hull, who had a summer home in nearby Lyme and Norma Terris, the original star of "Showboat," performed in several shows at the Ivoryton Playhouse. It must be remembered that the second season was the height of the Depression and nobody knew where Ivoryton was. In fact, it was not even on state maps! Mr. Stiefel literally "put Ivoryton on the map" by convincing the AAA Map Department that his playhouse was the first in what would one day be a thriving industry and the AAA agreed by including the town on all new maps published. Audiences were literally led to the playhouse by automobile caravans that daily paraded through the shore towns. By the end of the summer the idea had caught on—audiences grew and the company thrived.

It was during the second season that Katharine Hepburn was introduced to Connecticut audiences. Her reception was spontaneous and she became the leading lady. Some of the plays she appeared in were "The Little Accident," "Let Us Be Gay," and "The Man Came Back," with Henry Hull. Norma Terris was probably the first star to appear at the Playhouse and opened the season in "The Climax."

In 1978 the Ivoryton Playhouse fell upon hard times and there was another threat to its survival. Its survival was assured through the establishment of the Ivoryton Playhouse Foundation Inc., which acquired its physical plant in June, 1979.

The principal aim of the Foundation is to re-establish the Playhouse's preeminence as a place where professional entertainment is performed while serving as a community theatre to complement the seasonal demands of the former use. We hope you will join us and become a part of our exciting foundation.

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Ivoryton Playhouse Foundation

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Program Design: LaDon Bradburn-Stopa

COVER: Our new seal was designed by artist Richard L. Brooks of Essex, husband of trustee Bunny Brooks. Born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, Dick became a marine painter in his teens, but after Dartmouth and World War II he found himself the creator of the nationally syndicated Sunday and daily comic strip THE JACKSON TWINS. After thirty years of steering teen aged twins through life he moved to Essex and began painting again. He is well known locally for his limited edition of prints of a historic scene at Steamboat Dock now on sale at the museum.

Compliments of
RICHARD W. GATES

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